Farewell Remarks of Ambassador Bleich to
The National Press Club

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Well thank you very much, David. And I'd like to thank the National Press Club for inviting me to speak here today for my final appearance as the United States Ambassador to Australia.

It's very good to see all the members of the journalistic community here. It seems like you've survived the election night coverage. I was particularly concerned when I saw Joe O'Brien and Michael Usher trapped in some sort of virtual parliament for some period of time there.

[Laughter]

And I'm glad to see that they've retaken human form. You can tell that I'm a diplomat rather than a politician, because I actually assume that journalists are human.

[Laughter]

I won't even get into the whole gurgler thing that you were dropping politicians into on Channel 9.

I would like to congratulate Tony Abbott on his election as Prime Minister of Australia, and just say how much I've enjoyed working with him over these past four years. And how much we in the United States look forward to continuing our strong relationship with Australia under his leadership.

I also want to thank former Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard for their valuable service to our alliance during my time here. Together, these three leaders have allowed me to set a new record as the only U.S. ambassador who has served under four prime ministers…

[Laughter]

…in under four years.

[Laughter]

So I think this is a record that may last a while.

Indeed, I remember one of my very first trips back to the United States after I'd become ambassador, I was visiting with the President and he said, "Oh things have gotten pretty interesting down there in Australia." I said, "Yeah - I'd been there about a week, and they'd

spilled the opposition leader, and then a few months later spilled the Prime Minister. And they just had an election with a hung Parliament, and looks like they'll probably be the first minority Coalition Government since the 1940s." And the President looked at me and said, "What the hell have you been doing down there?"

[Laughter]

I was afraid he was going to send me to some country that we don't like.

[Laughter]

But it has been an absolutely unprecedented period in Australia, as well as for the United States and for our alliance. And I think it's worth recalling where things stood just four years ago.

When I first arrived in Canberra I'd say there were serious questions about the U.S.-Australia alliance. Four years ago the narrative for the region was pessimistic. The U.S. economy had been battered by a recession after the global financial crisis, and our security forces were engaged in two very difficult wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And I think the most common question that I heard from the Press Gallery was, could the United States meet the rising demands of this region, or would it recede, or even be fenced out by rising powers?

Some pundits claimed that the U.S. was in a permanent decline, and they urged Australia to start looking to alternatives to its alliance with the United States. And Australia at that time was also facing its own challenges. The economy was also suffering from the global financial crisis, and Australian forces were spread thin in both Timor Leste and in Afghanistan. And some commentators were saying that a challenged Australia needed to start hedging both for and against the alliance.

You know, challenges and crises reveal character; and what would we do when our alliance is tested in this way? And looking back now, I think our nations have delivered their answer. Rather than back away, we engaged more deeply. My President came here and addressed your Parliament, and your Prime Minister came to Washington, DC, and addressed a joint session of Congress to express a shared vision for this region. When our confidence was ebbing, we rededicated ourselves to a common vision and to our alliance.

Together, we have updated and we have modernized every single element of our partnership. We constructed the world's largest gas facilities, we set new records on trade and investment. We landed a space laboratory on the surface of Mars. We helped prevent a nuclear meltdown in Fukushima. We produced the largest joint exercises in the entire world. We took our alliance into the new frontiers of cyberspace and near-space satellites. We dismantled Osama bin Laden's

terrorist network, we reinvented the regional architecture of the Asia Pacific. We reduced nuclear stockpiles - and, most of all, we brought Oprah Winfrey to these shores.

[Laughter]

But four years later, both of our nations, and our alliance, are stronger than ever. And so that's what I'd like to discuss today - the story of that resilience, our current rebalance, and what this means for the challenges that face us in the future.

So let me start with resilience. During tough times, both of our nations made some very hard choices. When capital was scarce, America's biggest companies didn't lay low, they made some of their biggest investments in all of history right here in Australia. Today, our bilateral investment tops over $1 trillion across all dimensions. We are both your largest investor, and the largest destination for Australian investment. And those massive projects that you see all across the northern part of Australia are a statement of our faith. We are betting, and we are betting hard, on Australia.

And the result of that bet has been that both of our economies have gotten stronger. The U.S. economy defied every one of the doomsday predictions that we would be in a two or three-year recession, if not a depression. Instead of a recession, our economy has risen every day that I've been here. Our stock market has more than doubled since I arrived. Our economy has grown every single quarter, and unemployment has fallen every single month. We've revolutionised our entire energy mix, so we will now be the largest producer of oil in the world, and we are already the cheapest producer of natural gas in the world. And this has made our economy competitive again.

In fact, the International Monetary Fund, the IMF, just released its competitiveness index, and the United States is the number one most competitive economy in the world. While we're not satisfied yet, we are well on the way to recovery.

And Australia, too, managed through a very turbulent time. A minority government, uncertain world economics, and a series of very difficult challenges. And Australia didn't merely survive those challenges, it grew faster than any other OECD economy in the world. In my time, just the four years that I've been here, Australia rose from the 15th largest economy in the world, to the 12th. And Australia has earned a seat on the UN Security Council, where it is currently the president, and it will soon take over - assuming the leadership of the G20 - the world's most important economic forum.

And we both met our security challenges. The U.S. completed its mission in Iraq, and Australia completed its mission in East Timor. And together we made the very tough choice to increase our numbers in Afghanistan, and we've nearly completed our security mission there as well. At

the end of this year, we'll be able to hand full security control back to the Afghan people. Terror still exists, but Osama bin Laden has met a just fate. His network in Afghanistan has been decimated, and his networks around the world are weakened and crumbling.

And so in hard times, we bet on each other. We met our challenges head-on, and we came out stronger. The doubts that I heard four years ago are disappearing. According to Lowy, since 2007, support for the U.S.-Australia alliance among Australians has actually risen from 63 per cent to 82 per cent today. And that's just proof that when faith in our alliance is tested, we answered with even greater faith.

But we've done more than just survive tough times. We have moved forward despite them.

And that brings me to the rebalance. We've stayed strategically alert, and even when our energies could easily have been distracted elsewhere, we stayed focused. Now two years ago, President Obama and then-Prime Minister Gillard, announced this rebalance, which is a series of economic, diplomatic, and security initiatives and shifts that would turn our focus more on this region. The rebalance was, of course, essential, because this region is now the new center of economic gravity in the world. How it develops will largely define whether this century is marked by conflict or by cooperation - by needless suffering, or by great human progress.

And our job has to be to ensure that this century will be peaceful, and that it will be prosperous. And that's meant doing what it takes to help economies rise, to help new middle classes find their voice, and to teach nations how to cooperate. The President's announcement, frankly, could have been given anywhere. But together, Australia and the United States, we chose to make that announcement here in Australia. Because ultimately partnerships and cooperation will determine the fate of this region. And there is no better model of partnership in the world than the partnership between the United States and Australia.

You know, the truth is that trust comes very naturally to us. America and Australia were largely settled by people who arrived without pedigrees and without property. Some came by choice, some came in chains. But they came with a common creed, that it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter who your parents were, everyone deserves a chance. Everyone deserves a fair go, and anyone who's willing to lend a hand is always welcome.

Our vision for the Asia-Pacific is just an extension of those values that define us: belief in equality, in human rights, in open markets and in opportunity. We believe everyone's got a right to speak their mind, to have a say in their own government, and how they'll be governed, to live by the laws that they make, with everyone respecting the rule of law. That faith, that faith has been our nation's greatest asset. Our belief in those values – and in each other again and again – has gotten us to overcome two World Wars, a Cold War, economic downturns, terror attacks, and every other problem that we've faced in our nation's histories.

So what is this rebalance? What are the pieces of it?

Let me start with diplomacy. We built a new and incredibly powerful web of connections among Asia-Pacific countries, because the way we're going to stop conflict is to form these new connections, to agree upon certain rules, and commit to working together through whatever differences we have, peacefully. Through the last four years we've upgraded every one of our alliances, we've added new partners, we've joined new multilateral organisations, we've strengthened our existing relationships, we've formed new regional agreements. Just look at what's happened in the last four years, we signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, we've made our first ambassador to ASEAN, we have joined the East Asia Summit at the principals level with the President participating, we've become a dialogue partner in the Indian Ocean regional cooperation group, IOR-ARC, and we have reinvigorated APEC.

As some of the beleaguered folks over at DFAT will tell you, the diplomatic rebalance has been very, very real. We have just dramatically increased the tempo of every part of our engagement, including having visits from over half of the United States' Cabinet, the largest delegations in history from our Congress, the President himself, you know, and of course, Oprah.

[Laughter]

In terms of our economic rebalance, our partnership has proved the value of free trade. Our bilateral trade has grown dramatically in the last four years despite the fact that we had a global financial crisis. And the reason it grew was because we have a free trade agreement; and so today our two nations are working together with ten other nations to extend the prosperity of free trade throughout the region.

Four years ago we had this idea of a Trans-Pacific Partnership, and I remember coming into rooms like this and hearing it ridiculed. You know, people referred to this mixture of emerging economies – Peru, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam – as sort of a coalition of the willing. Since then, we have overcome all the doubters. The agreement has grown to include Canada and Mexico and Japan. Currently, over 40 per cent of the world's gross domestic product is in this Trans-Pacific Partnership, and we are right on the cusp of it becoming reality.

And those TPP standards are the new higher quality standards that are going to define this region. It's not just about reducing artificial tariffs; this region's future prosperity depends upon transparency, it depends on openness, it depends on eliminating corruption, it depends on rule of law, fair labor standards, environmental standards, and that is what this agreement will produce. And that's why I know that the President, when he speaks with Prime Minister Abbott, is looking forward to discussing the TPP because open markets and free trade are going to be vital to the success of this next century.

Let me finally get to defense, which is the last element of our rebalance. We've modernized every single aspect of our defense to keep the Pacific Ocean safe and secure. Our engagement here isn't new. The U.S. has been, and it always will be, a Pacific nation. Our largest states, by geographic size, by population, by wealth, are all on the Pacific Ocean. Our Pacific Command is based in Hawaii and our facilities in Guam sit squarely in the Pacific. And for 70 years from Darwin to the Pacific Islands, from South East Asia to the Korean Peninsula, Americans have served and died to protect this region, along with our Australian mates.

But while our commitment has existed for decades, what's required now has changed. The threats we face today are very different from the threats that confronted our parents' and grandparents' generations. National security is no longer about a matter of conflicts between two nations. Instead, today, we've got to defend ourselves against threats that have no borders, or enemies who carry no flags and wear no uniforms. Today's threats are more likely to come from nuclear proliferators, from cybercriminals, from pirates, from terror networks, and from traffickers in drugs, weapons and people.

We're also facing threats that are greater than any one nation can handle. We're soon going to be adding 2.5 billion people to the middle class in the Asia-Pacific, and unless we work together, there will not be enough food, water, and energy to feed, hydrate and power that population. And solving these problems is going to require that we work together to find our solutions, because no nation's going to be able to do that alone. In fact, if we fail, this region could face a future that's filled with conflicts over resources, mass migrations, droughts, famines, and riots.

But if we succeed, we can create new markets that will improve life all across the globe, and the greatest reduction in poverty in all of human history. And that outcome is going to depend entirely on our ability to cooperate. So, because of this, our defense depends more than ever on binding nations together, decreasing mistrust, and increasing collaboration; and that's been the focus of our rebalance and our force posture reforms. We've done, and we're continuing to do, that with training rotations in this region, in Darwin, and elsewhere. And it's not just with Australia. We're doing it with Malaysia, and Singapore, and Indonesia, and with the Philippines, and other nations, because we have to be prepared for everything from natural disasters to pirate attacks to traditional armed conflicts.

Last month we conducted our largest bilateral exercise in the world here off the shores of Australia. And during the course of that exercise, we trained together to deal with everything from delivering aid after a disaster to restoring peace and preventing genocide in a violent civil war. Through this, and through these other exercises, we've become more compatible, more aware of our collective strengths, and we're better prepared for any crisis. And we've also modernised America's defense posture across the entire Asia-Pacific. We're going to have more

ships in this region than before, more training in this region, and we've now made it easier for our two nations to cooperate by ratifying the Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty.

We've ventured boldly into the world's new frontiers of cyberspace and near space. Now, I don't have to tell you that cyber is just the wild, wild west now. The damage that can be accomplished online can be every bit as devastating as a physical attack. And because of this, in the year 2011, we recognized cyber in our alliance treaty, in the ANZUS Treaty, and we've taken dozens of critical measures since to protect our systems.

And we've tackled threats in near space. You know, all those satellites that are orbiting our planet in near space – that is the central nervous system of all of our networks and all of our communications. We are at risk if any of those are intentionally attacked, or if they collide, and the debris alone from a collision could bring our systems all crashing down.

So last year in Perth, the United States and Australia made protecting satellites our new priority. Together, we're building a network that will provide nations information on the orbits of satellites, and also about space debris. And that's going to make tracking more accurate, and it's going to reduce the risk of accidental collisions. In short, on every dimension, every space, virtual space, on the ground and up above, diplomatically, economically and security-wise, we're moving forward to foster cooperation in this region.

And that's what brings me to my final point. None of this happens by accident, it depends on faith in ourselves and in those who represent us. You know, during elections we tend to demean and belittle our governments, talk about what they haven't done and what they should have done. And we tend to condemn our leaders.

But today, today on September 11 of all days, I hope we remember that our elections and our leaders have been our nation's strength. Our nations depend on trust and a common belief that we're all in this thing together.

Twelve years ago today, terrorists killed nearly 3,000 people, Americans, Australians, representatives of 90 different nations. And their target wasn't simply those who they killed. Their ultimate target was us, those of us who survived. They hope to make us do what terrified people do, to turn on each other, to fear each other, to think first of ourselves and forget about one another, because that is the one thing that will ruin a democracy.

Confronted by fear on that day, we've chosen not to allow ourselves to be defined by fear. Americans – and our friends and our allies around the world – we resisted that natural instinct to turn inward. Rather than withdraw, we chose to reach out even further and to build new networks. We invented Facebook and Twitter and LinkedIn and whole new ways of connecting ourselves to the rest of the world. Rather than turn on each other, we bonded even more tightly

than ever before. And rather than just think of ourselves, we made September 11 our national day of service, service to others.

Each year on this day we perform acts of service, acts of charity, of grace, and of giving. And this week I know members of our embassy will be cleaning wetlands here in Canberra, donating blood, donating goods to charities, planting trees. They're doing what public servants do every single day. They're giving the most precious gift that any of us has, which is our short time here on earth, to help make a better world for others.

I will always remember a bone-chillingly cold day here in Canberra, two September 11ths ago on the ten-year anniversary, and in the face of freezing cold and driving rain, Australians stood undeterred, unafraid, in solidarity with us.

That, that is our democracy.

I'm not a politician, or a career diplomat, but the President asked me to pause my career, pause our lives, to strengthen a vital relationship, and today is the anniversary of that. He nominated me on September 11, exactly four years ago today, and I'm grateful that this date will always define my tenure, because for me the spirit of September 11 is what our nations and what our alliance has always been about. It's about ordinary people who put up their hands and offer to help.

And this is a spirit that I've witnessed here over and over again during my time in Australia, and it's one I'm going to remember. I'm not going to remember all the gala dinners, and the visits by leaders, and the negotiations. What will stay with me always will be those moments where Australians and Americans revealed that special character together.

I remember some Victorian and New South Wales firefighters who ran from Los Angeles to New York City raising money so that they would arrive on September 11, and deliver those funds to the widows, orphans, and survivors of their fallen New York fire fighting mates.

I remember a team of Aussies and Americans who were out on a runway a few years ago in the dead of night trying to figure out how to put water cannons onto pallets and load them onto C-17 cargo planes, which has never been done before, in order to get these water cannons up to Japan and save tens of thousands of people from what could have been an absolute world catastrophe.

I remember going up to Queensland – as a bunch of Americans who had been watching the Queensland floods, businesses, individuals, just started sending cheques because they wanted to help. They saw people suffering on the other side of the earth and they wanted to help. And I went up to deliver those cheques, and I went to a place outside Ipswich where people were lining up. Their homes had been devastated, and they're getting in lines to get shovels, and they weren't

getting shovels to dig themselves out, they were getting them to dig out other people who they knew had been hit even harder than they'd been hit.

I remember those things and I think: That's it, that's who we are. That's what makes us strong as people, Australians and Americans together. It's that we're never satisfied with the status quo. We always believe somehow there's a better day ahead, that we can do something to make someone else's life better. In the U.S., we'll say, you know, it will be okay, buddy. In Australia you say, you know, she'll be right, mate. But it's the same message, it's the same belief.

These are the qualities that define us, and that have made our alliance endure and that give me confidence that we can handle together whatever the future may hold. To witness this for the last four years, to be part of it, has been the greatest honour and privilege in my life.

So my wife, Becky, and I will leave this country with hearts full of great gratitude. Thank you, and God bless you Australia.

[Applause]

DAVID SPEERS: Ambassador Bleich, thank you very much for that wonderful speech. We are now going to move to our journalists' question and the first is from David Wroe.

DAVID WROE: David Wroe from The Age and Sydney Morning Herald. Ambassador, thank you for those very moving wards. Let me say thank you also - wish you well for the future and also wish the San Francisco Giants all the best for next year's World Series.

JEFFREY BLEICH: Should have said that at the beginning of the season.

DAVID WROE: Next year, next year.

JEFFREY BLEICH: Next year.

DAVID WROE: I'd just like to ask you about - a broad question about Syria. Referring to the President's address this morning from the White House, he said - I'm just going to quote the closing passage - he said America is not the world's police man but when with modest effort and risk we can stop children from being gassed to death I believe we should act. That's what makes America different, that's what makes us exceptional. He said it better than I did just then, but that articulated for me what is at stake not just for world and the for region but for America herself.

There's been a lot of talk about war fatigue in the United States, but in fact Syria is quite a different - what is being proposed is quite different in the sense of its sort of - the purity, I suppose, of the motivation behind what the President is proposing. We're talking about stopping dictators from gassing children to death. Not to say that the other motives have been impure but that's how it compares. What do you say to people around the world, the many people around the world, who value greatly America's leadership on issues like this, its moral leadership? And what do you say to people who fear that the war fatigue is also a fatigue in the United States among people who are worried about bread and butter issues for that American exceptionalism?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Well, I think as the President said today, the U.S. doesn't get involved in every conflict and we are not even considering war in Syria. But we do have responsibilities as great nations. And so for two years throughout the Syrian conflict we've said that we will not get involved in this conflict except to call upon the leaders of both sides, the regime and the opposition, to resist violence, to find a peaceful solution and we've offered to provide and we have provided humanitarian assistance to refugees. But otherwise we've had four very clear rules.

What will draw us into some kind of limited intervention, what would change our posture, would be if there are attacks on our allies, if there was acts of genocide conducted, if the country was used as a breeding ground or a haven for terrorism that could strike us, or if there was use of weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. These were clear lines. And these are clear lines that the world has signed on to. The prohibition on genocide, the prohibition on weapons of mass destruction, the prohibition on terrorism, the prohibition on aggression.

If we don't stand up for those principles, then we aren't being the countries that I was just talking about. The ones that say, even if it's hard for us, when people are out there gassing children, we need to step up. If we can do something we have to try. That's who we are, that's what defines us, and that's what the President has said we are prepared to do.

DAVID SPEERS: Kieran Gilbert.

KIERAN GILBERT: Ambassador, Kieran Gilbert from Sky News. Can I thank you as well for your service and contribution to the Australia-U.S. alliance and apologize on behalf of the nation for the boring few years in Australian politics. It's just been terrible.

JEFFREY BLEICH: Thanks, Kieran.

KIERAN GILBERT: Prime Minister-elect Tony Abbott has said that he supports the rotation of marines through the Top End. He seems to indicate that he'd like it to go further. Is that possible? Is it likely?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Well, we currently have 250 marines rotating in Darwin for a six month period. Our expectation, our hope is that next year we'll increase up to 1100 and that ultimately by 2017 we'll get to around 2500. That's been the goal from the beginning and that's the extent of it. But what we're finding is that it really is producing the ability to do what I described earlier, to stitch together this region, to allow us to know each other's capabilities, know each other's capabilities, know each other's intentions, get common communications systems in place, to figure out where there are kinks.

Because, you know, if you do have a massive flood in a region, we've all got to respond together and you don't want to have the responders arrive on a beach and then say, well we need places to stay and we need food and we need water, we can't even begin to delivering aid for a while until we take care of our own people. You need to be able to land there and lay out hospitals and have your own fully equipped, fully staffed resources. That takes planning and practice and work and most countries in the region don't yet have that capacity. And so this is all about capacity building and while you're building capacity you build trust.

If there is an incident at sea, we know who to call because we have worked with them in a training exercise. And you can call it, you know, a captain or an admiral who is from another country, and they know who you are, they like you, they trust you, and you can resolve things peacefully. So knowing each other's capabilities, knowing each other's intentions, and knowing each other, that is a key to a safer region and that's what these training rotations are accomplishing.

DAVID SPEERS: Our next question from Nick Butterly.

NICK BUTTERLY: Ambassador, Nick Butterly from The West Australian newspaper. Tony Abbott said that he'd like to be an Asia first Prime Minister, would you like to see him put Washington further up his list of priorities? And also just back on the Syria, would you like to see if there is some sort of limited intervention, obviously Australia couldn't do much, but would the U.S. be looking for Australia to play some sort of role, perhaps a logistical role or some further sort of role in that case?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Well, on the first question, with respect to focus on Asia, as I was saying, we're focused on Asia. We have - that doesn't mean that, you know, we're not focused on our alliance, our alliance is part of our focus on Asia, and so we think that we're in perfect sync with what Prime Minister Abbott has said, which is let's focus on this region which is the center of gravity for growth. He talked about the importance of Indonesia, we couldn't agree more. It's a very important place for both nations to be building friendship, building partnership, building infrastructure and capacity, so we can all rise together.

With respect to Syria, I think Australia has once again demonstrated part of what we love about Australia, you know? Even in the midst of an intense political election, no-one politicized the issue. Both sides, the Government and the Opposition, Labor and Liberal National Party Coalition said, we condemn the use of chemical weapons, we believe a response is appropriate, and we will do what's in our capacity to reinforce the norms against any use of chemical weapons and the ban on chemical weapons.

Now, in this case, the type of limited and proportionate strike that's required is one that very few nations in the world can accomplish and that's one reason why everyone looks to the United States in cases like this. But we have been very pleased with the response of Australia on the issue of Syria.

DAVID SPEERS: Next question from John Kerin.

JOHN KERIN: Ambassador, John Kerin from the Financial Review. I just wanted to ask about the Trans-Pacific Partnership, do you still believe that the end of the year is a reasonable timetable to conclude that? And have you - have the - Australia's objections, if you like, been overcome in relation to things like allowing companies to sue governments and the like?

JEFFREY BLEICH: No, I think we are going to work as hard as possible to meet that deadline. If it extends into next year, that doesn't mean that it's not going to happen, it just means, you know, it's slower than the process we all want to achieve but we are going to work as hard as we can to make sure it happens this year because we have tremendous momentum. And as we've said, what tends to happen in these trade agreements is, you know, we - I think we've had our 18th or 19th session of the TPP and we've been closing out a lot of chapters, but then you get to that point where you've gained momentum from closing the chapters you can agree on and now you've got some tough things to go through and every trade agreement that's ever signed gets to this point.

We're at that point now and I think we all just need to, you know, lock arms and jump together and that's going to be the effort that we do over this next three months.

DAVID SPEERS: And our next question from Michael Keating.

MICHAEL KEATING: Michael Keating from Keating Media. Ambassador. First of all, congratulations on your time. I've known you for a little while during it and I've always enjoyed our conversations during that time.

My question is, you've pointed to so many highlights of the U.S.-Australia alliance, do you think there's any further for it to go and what would your advice be to your successor? And, as you say, you've seen four prime ministers. Are there any highlights of your time in Australia that you'd be willing to share with us?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Well, first, in terms of my advice to my successor, I wouldn't presume to give him advice, you know? Honestly, he is going to be a superb ambassador. If I've got any complaint about Ambassador Berry it's that he's going to make you all forgot me too quickly. But he is smart, he's energetic, he's hard working, he's well connected, on the Hill, with the President, and across the Administration and I think it's a testament to how much we care about the relationship that he's going to be the next ambassador and frankly, it makes it much easier for Becky and for me to leave knowing that it's in such a safe and capable set of hands. So I wouldn't even presume to try and give him advice.

In terms of the things I'm most proud of, you know, I've thought about this and I think if I could really reduce it just to one or two things, then I probably failed at this job. Because the relationship is like a marriage and it's hundreds of things that we do together that allows us achieve the big things that I was describing. And no - I mean, no one ever says, you know, in your marriage in the last four years, what's the one or two things you're most proud of? It kind of means, you know, if you answer that, marriage may be in a little trouble.

My - there are certain things that I'll certainly remember and those are the really emotional moments I'll describe, but there are also just some, you know, crazy out of body experiences. One of my favorites was when the President was out here and we were - normally, you always see that image of the president going up and down the stairs to Air Force One by himself. That's because everyone else goes out on the back staircase. There's, like, another one that no one ever takes footage of. So we got to the plane and he was just in such a great mood having been here in

Australia that, as I was starting to walk to the back of the plane, he said, "No, no, come on Jeff, come on up with me."

So, you know, as usual, he trots up to the top and does the big Presidential wave and I trotted up behind and I get to the very top and I thought, "Well I can't do a big presidential wave, you know? But, you know, how many times in my life am I going to be standing here?" So I did, like, a little wave.

[Laughter]

JEFFREY BLEICH: And I walked inside and the President's like, "I saw that."

[Laughter]

JEFFREY BLEICH: But there are these incredibly special out of body moments that we're going to hold very, very dear.

DAVID SPEERS: Matt Moran.

MATT MORAN: Ambassador, thanks for your service. Matt Moran from Channel 10. Firstly, you were quite good friends with Kevin Rudd. What's your opinion of how he was treated by his own party? And also with Tony Abbott being probably closer to the Republicans than the Democrats, how do you think that will affect the relationship? And finally, where are you going now? What's your next job?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Man, that's three questions! Okay, well first, I was friendly with Prime Minister Rudd. I was very friendly with Prime Minister Gillard. I've been very friendly with Prime Minister Abbott, very friendly with I think four foreign ministers and have a great relationship with Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, so - or presumed Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. You know, so my sense is that I want all them to be treated the same way, you know. I think anyone who steps into the arena of politics is setting themselves up for a very tough, challenging, critical time and I think we all should pay tribute to their service.

And what I love about our elections is after an election ends, we all move on. There are no tanks in the streets in Canberra today and you move forward, you don't worry about recriminations. At least that's how I've always tried to conduct myself in the US. And so that's what I'd say about that.

There were so many questions. What was the second one?

QUESTION: Your next position, where are you going? And the relationship between the Americans and Australians?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Yeah, well, I think in terms of what I'm going to do next, [laughs] I'd say that I'm being deliberately coy. The President may have some ideas in mind for me. My wife may have some other ideas in mind for me.

[Laughter]

JEFFREY BLEICH: I'm going to let the two of them work it out.

DAVID SPEERS: And the final part about Tony Abbott being perhaps closer to the Republican side of politics, how that's going to go?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Now, you know, that's just not true. I think we've had a number of meetings between - I know Secretary Clinton spent time with the then Opposition Leader Abbott and so did the President when he was out here. Every one of the Cabinet members, every one of the Members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans have spent time with the Prime Minister. They've all gotten on very well with him. And we have always made progress, whether it's a Democrat or Republican in the White House, or Labor, Liberal or National in the Lodge. I mean, you know, we made tremendous progress when President Bush was president and Prime Minister Rudd was Prime Minister. We made tremendous progress during the Keating era when you had different parties in different office.

I think you just go back through history. We've never had time when we didn't make progress together. So, I don't see any reason for concern.

DAVID SPEERS: Our next question from Brendan Nicholson.

BRENDAN NICHOLSON: Brendan Nicholson from The Australian, Ambassador, and thanks from us too. Very entertaining. In the defense section of your address today, you talked about the need for nations to cooperate and you talk about binding together. Now we've had serious defense cuts in recent years. The incoming Prime Minister Tony Abbott has undertaken to restore defense spending very comprehensively over the next few years to get it back up to what it was basically. How does the United States feel about levels of defense spending in Australia? And do you feel that we need to carry our weight in terms of the alliance?

JEFFREY BLEICH: I'd say generally, both of our nations understand that there'll be periods where defense spending will go up and it will go down. It depends upon our economies and how they're performing at a particular point of time, it will depend a little bit on the security challenges that we face, it will depend a little bit on the politics of the day. And so, we have always relied on Australia to meet its international obligations, its alliance obligations and to meet its own security needs with whatever resources it has at a particular given time. And if you look over the last seven years that has been a pretty good bet. Australia has.

In terms of philosophically, I think the U.S. is looking for all of our partners to share the burden bigger with us. The U.S. right now – U.S. taxpayers are bearing a disproportionate share of responsibility for the world security. And the more partners that can work with us and lighten our load, the more sustainable our efforts will be, because our taxpayers have the same qualms and impatience as any other taxpayer.

But we are confident that Australia today, as it has throughout history, will be one of our best partners in doing this. And I think for all of our partners having that increased capacity, sharing the burden will also improve their own confidence, their own flexibility, their own capabilities and that's good for everyone.

So we encourage burden-sharing, but at the same time, we don't have a particular point of view about where Australia's defense budget is today as opposed to a year ago as opposed to three years from today. We've got a lot of trust in you.

DAVID SPEERS: Can I ask on a related matter, the cuts haven't been just in defense, but in foreign aid spending as well. Is there a U.S. perspective on what's happened there?

JEFFREY BLEICH: Yeah. No, I think the U.S. perspective on foreign aid is that even in tough times, if you look during the global financial crisis when our stock market was plummeting to 6500 and people saw their life savings evaporating, we continued to put money into foreign aid. And we did it because we knew that our economy was going to come back. And the question is what was it going to come back into? Was it going to come back into a world that was rife with human suffering, conflict? Or would it be one in which you had greater stability and a world that we care about?

I remember during - I think the most impressive thing that I learned about Abraham Lincoln was that in the midst of the Civil War he funded the largest college program in all of American history, the College Land-Grant Program. And you think, you know, we were in the midst of the

Civil War. More people died in that war than in all of our conflicts combined. And the very existence of the union was at stake and people were asking him, why are you doing this? And he said, because when this war's over, and we have a union again, I want it to be a great union, and educating our people is part of being a great union.

So, we'll continue to support foreign aid. We'll be smart about it. We'll be strategic about it. And we're confident, again, that because Australia and the U.S. tend to see the world the same way, that we'll make the right choices. Things will go up and down for a whole variety of reasons, but we will remain firm in that effort.

DAVID SPEERS: Our next question from Bernard Keane.

BERNARD KEANE: Bernard Keane from Crikey, Your Excellency. Thank you for your presentation today and thank you for being such an accessible Ambassador during your time here. It's much appreciated.

JEFFREY BLEICH: Thank you very much.

BERNARD KEANE: A question on something that you touched on a little bit in your address today. A couple of years ago in 2010 and 2011, then-Secretary Clinton gave a couple of quite significant speeches about the importance of freedom of expression on the Internet. It was somewhat in the context of the Arab Spring, but it was also more broad than that. She spoke about the importance of freedom of expression, the importance of on-line anonymity and even supported encryption on-line.

Now, in retrospect, do those speeches ring a little hollow given what we've learnt since then about - mainly via Edward Snowden - about the activities of the U.S. Government in monitoring the Internet? And, in that context, what's your message to Australians about whether they can use the Internet and use the products of Google and Apple and other big U.S. corporations and have the security of their information protected?

JEFFREY BLEICH: I think what - I recall President [Secretary] Clinton speaking very passionately and very sincerely about the importance of an open Internet and Internet freedom and freedom of speech on the Internet. And those words don't ring hollow to me at all. They are a reflection of the fact that we believe that the virtual world is effectively the same as the real world, in the sense that the same rules ultimately will apply. And that means that there will be

crime and there will be attacks on-line, just as there are in the physical world, and we have to use, effectively, similar tools to stop them.

So, you know, the PRISM program, which is the one that has gotten so much attention, I think it's a perfect example of precisely that issue where you are protecting people's privacy, you're protecting their civil rights, but you're also preventing crime. You know, when any one of us walks into a bank, our image is captured and all that's captured is basically the equivalent of meta data. A person of this height, wearing these clothes walked into the bank at this hour and then left at some other time, you know. And we're all used to that. We're all fine with it. And the reason that it's valuable is because in the event that there was a bank robbery, it's good to know if you were the one who came in with a gun, or if you were someone who was in the bank at the same time and might be a witness and might be able to help solve the crime. But once you capture that image, you still have to go to a judge and you still have to get permission to find out more about the individual who was captured on film in order to proceed.

Well, that's what happens with the PRISM program. You know, there are people who are making phone calls in very suspicious patterns on the Internet. You know, they're calling places that are known for drug trafficking or known for nuclear weapons proliferation. They're calling at odd hours. They're calling in ways that are consistent with patterns of criminality. But even then you still have to go to a judge and get those approved.

That's the balance that we strike on the Internet, just as it's a balance that we strike in the real world, that we allow meta data to be used. But in terms of people's individual privacy, in terms of requiring some process and some basis for reasonable cause before people's privacy is compromised, and in terms of encouraging everyone to be able to be free to express their points of view, we've stayed firm and consistent. So they don't ring hollow to me, they ring especially true, even more so the more facts that have become available.

DAVID SPEERS: Now the final question is from Peter Hartcher.

PETER HARTCHER: Ambassador, Peter Hartcher from The Sydney Morning Herald. Former Deputy Secretary of State with the U.S., Rich Armitage, likes to say it's unthinkable that we could wake up tomorrow and discover that a major war has broken out in Europe, but that it is quite possible that we could wake up tomorrow and discover that a major war has broken out in Asia.

JEFFREY BLEICH: There's nothing more dangerous than a former diplomat.

[Laughter]

JEFFREY BLEICH: We say anything.

PETER HARTCHER: I think a diplomat was only ever applied as a definition for Rich Armitage in a technical sense.

[Laughter]

PETER HARTCHER: The greatest single force for instability… strategic instability in the Asia Pacific is China's increasing territorial assertiveness with a range of other nation states. Do you think there's anything in prospect that the U.S. can do or that the alliance with Australia can do to try to lower the risk and interrupt the trajectory of conflict between China and other states in the region?

JEFFREY BLEICH: You know, we don't see a trajectory of conflict. What we see is increasing communication, discussion and really sort of candid work together between the United States, China and all the rising powers of the region. With respect to the area where you say there are flash points, you know, we think that history has demonstrated that there are lots of different ways that you can share maritime space. You can draw territorial lines, you can have [indistinct] development agreements, you can do a lot of different things.

The one thing that has never quite worked over the course of human history is ships are bumping into each other trying to assert themselves. So we have called on all parties in this region to develop a code of conduct. We don't have any particular claim in the region. We don't have any stake in the resources or territorial claims in the water, but we do have two real general concerns.

One is how you solve conflicts in this region, which, again, we think should be done through a code of conduct rather than just, you know, unencumbered ships moving towards one another. And I think the other thing is that freedom of navigation is going to be critical for everyone. You need to have every nation in the world know that they can go through the Straits of Malacca without worrying about delays in their shipments.

Trillions of dollars go through that region, so we all need to be protective of it. And in that sense, we have called on the parties and we're continuing to work to get a code of conduct in that region. But that's a positive thing. That's saying we are all talking about the same issue. We understand the concern, and we're building towards a resolution.

DAVID SPEERS: Please thank Ambassador Jeff Bleich.

[Applause]

DAVID SPEERS: Ambassador, we do wish you very well with whatever is next and good luck to Becky Bleich in winning that battle.

[Laughter]

DAVID SPEERS: As you've heard from, I think, all of the journalists here, we do really appreciate your service, your availability to us, your eloquence, and what a wonderful speech you've given us today.